

Message Text

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ACTION EA-13

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ADP-00 EUR-10 PM-03 CIAE-00 INR-10

NSAE-00 RSC-01 L-02 IO-03 NSC-10 NSCE-00 PRS-01 PA-01

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R 190515 Z MAY 73

FM AMCONSUL HONG KONG

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7015

INFO AMEMBASSY TOKYO

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

USLO PEKING

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L HONG KONG 4965

LIMDIS

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR CH UR TW

SUBJ: PRC SILENT ON SOVIET NAVAL VESSELS IN TAIWAN STRAIT

SUMMARY: WE DO NOT KNOW WHY PEKING HAS SO FAR KEPT SILENT ABOUT THE TRANSIT LAST WEEK OF A SMALL SOVIET FLOTILLA THROUGH THE TAIWAN STRAIT, BUT IT MAY BE PARTLY BECAUSE THE PRC DOES NOT WANT ITS RECENT CLAIM OF US BACKING FOR THE EXCLUSION OF SOVIET INFLUENCE FROM TAIWAN TO APPEAR MERELY A BLUFF-- AS MIGHT BE THE CASE IF A BLAST WERE ISSUED AND THE US DID NOT CHIME IN. TAIPEI IS PRESUMABLY ON BALANCE RATHER PLEASED TO SEE THE SOVIETS TWEAKING THE DRAGON'S TAIL IN THIS WAY. MEANWHILE, THE PRC IS PROBABLY UNEASILY AWARE OF CURRENT REPORTS (WHOSE RELIABILITY WE CANNOT JUDGE) THE THE GRC HAS SENT A COUPLE OF ITS LEGISLATORS TO MOSCOW. END SUMMARY.

1. MAY 14 PRESS REPORT THAT A GROUP OF SOVIET NAVAL VESSELS
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HAD TRANSITED TAIWAN STRAIT HAS GENERATED SOME LOCAL COMMENTARY CRITICISING BOTH TAIPEI AND PEKING FOR EXCESSIVE SOFTNESS BECAUSE NEITHER HAS PROTESTED SOVIET ACTION. REALIZE FORMAL PROTEST FROM EITHER CAPITAL WOULD HAVE BEEN INVALID FROM STANDPOINT OF INTERNATIONAL LAW, BUT WONDER WHETHER ADDRESSEES ALSO PERCEIVE ANYTHING UNUSUAL OR SIGNIFICANT IN LACK OF SHARP PUBLIC REACTION ON EITHER SIDE OF STRAIT.

2. I OF COURSE HAVE NO DEFINITIVE EXPLANATION, BUT SOME SPECULATIONS OCCUR. FOR EXAMPLE, PRC WOULD OBVIOUSLY BE WARY OF PLAYING INTO SOVIET HANDS BY OVERREACTING. ALSO, HAVING SO RECENTLY INFORMED TAIWANESE COMPATRIOTS THAT PRC HAD A US PLEDGE (IN FORM OF SHANGHAI COMMUNIQUE) OF SUPPORT IN KEEPING SOVIET HANDS OFF TAIWAN, PRC MAY FEAR THAT IF IT DENOUNCED FLOTILLA' S PASSAGE THROUGH STRAIT AS A SINISTER PROVOCATION, AND IF US DID NOT CHIME IN, THEN PRC' S FEBRUARY 28 CLAIM OF US BACKING FOR EXCLUSION OF SOVIET " HEGEMONY" FROM TAIWAN MIGHT APPEAR MERELY BLUSTER OR BLUFF. TAIPEI, FOR ITS PART, NATURALLY GRATIFIED TO SEE PEKING WORRIED, WILL PRESUMABLY CONTINUE TO AVOID ANY ANTI- SOVIET BLAST , AS SEIVING MERELY TO REASSURE THE PRC.

3. AS OF POSSIBLE INTEREST IN THIS CONNECTION, SPANISH CONSUL GENERAL LA GUARDIA, NEWLY ARRIVED FROM POSTING AS CHARGE IN TAIPEI, TELLS ME HE HAS JUST RECEIVED " VERY RELIABLE" INFORMATION THE TWO MEMBERS OF GRC LEGISLATIVE YUAN HAVE GONE ON " MISSION" TO MOSCOW. I HAVE NO BASIS FOR PERSONAL ASSESSMENT OF RELIABILITY OF THIS REPORT. HOWEVER, SEEMS REASONABLE TO ASSUME THAT SAME REPORT (WHATEVER ITS RELIABILITY) MAY HAVE COME TO PEKING' S ATTENTION. IF SO, PRC WOULD BE ALL THE MORE STRONGLY INCLINED TO ISSUE A MINATORY BLAST REITERATING THE MESSAGE " SOVIET HANDS OFF TAIWAN" UNLESS, AS SUGGESTED ABOVE, PRC IS AFRAID OF SEEMING TO HAVE ITS BLUFF CALLED. IT IS TRUE THAT FEAR OF HAVING ITS BLUFF CALLED NEVER SEEMED TO DETER PRC FROM ISSUING ANY OF ITS HUNDREDS OF " SERIOUS WARNINGS" OVER ALLEGED US NAVAL INTRUSIONS; HOWEVER, INVOLVEMENT OF THE US VIA THE SHANGHAI COMMUNIQUE GIVES THE CURRENT SITUATION A DIMENSION WHICH THE OLD " SERIOUS WARNINGS" SITUATION DID NOT POSSESS.

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